

Adults' happiness on the decline, research found

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Credit: Bill Kuffrey/public domain

Are you less happy than your parents were at the same age? It may not be all in your head. Researchers led by San Diego State University professor Jean M. Twenge found adults over age 30 are not as happy as they used to be, but teens and young adults are happier than ever.

Researchers—including Ryne A. Sherman of Florida Atlantic University

and Sonja Lyubomirsky of University of California, Riverside—analyzed data from four nationally representative samples of 1.3 million Americans ages 13 to 96 taken from 1972 to 2014.

They found that after 2010, the age advantage for happiness found in prior research vanished. There is no longer a positive correlation between [age](#) and happiness among adults, and adults older than 30 are no longer significantly happier than those ages 18 to 29.

"Our current culture of pervasive technology, attention-seeking, and fleeting relationships is exciting and stimulating for teens and [young adults](#), but may not provide the stability and sense of community that [mature adults](#) require," said Twenge, who is also the author of "Generation Me."

Data showed that 38 percent of adults older than 30 said they were "very happy" in the early 1970s, which shrunk to 32 percent in the 2010s. Twenty-eight percent of adults ages 18 to 29 said they were "very happy" in the early 1970s, versus 30 percent in the 2010s.

Over the same time, teens' happiness increased: 19 percent of 12th graders said they were "very happy" in the late 1970s, versus 23 percent in the 2010s.

"American culture has increasingly emphasized high expectations and following your dreams— things that feel good when you're young," Twenge said. "However, the average mature adult has realized that their dreams might not be fulfilled, and less happiness is the inevitable result. Mature [adults](#) in previous eras might not have expected so much, but expectations are now so high they can't be met."

That drop in happiness occurred for both men and women, said Twenge. "A previous study in 2008 got quite a bit of attention when it found that

women's happiness had declined relative to men's. We now find declines in both men's and women's [happiness](#), especially after 2010."

The results were published today in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

More information: *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, [spp.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... 602933.full.pdf+html](http://spp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../602933.full.pdf+html)

Provided by San Diego State University

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